Lt.-Col. C. H. Weston,
Three Years with the New Zealanders.

.

CHAPTER V

WINTER IN EGYPT

THE Staff was wise in its generation when it placed us in winter quarters in the desert, near the Suez Canal and Ismailia. The desert in winter is roomy and healthy, and from ancient times has been the retreat of would-be anchorites.

Before we settled down a certain amount of reorganization had to be done. Sir Alexander Godley was promoted Temporary Lieutenant-General to the Corps, although still retaining control of the N.Z.E.F., and from the command of our Mounted Brigade, Brigadier-General A. H. Russell came to the Division with temporary rank of Major-General, shortly afterwards receiving his K.C.M.G. However good its personnel may be, a Military Force, or indeed any corporate body, can only reach a high standard if its leaders are good, and we can judge ourselves fortunate in having Sir Andrew Russell at our head. As a young man he had been for some years in the Regular Army, and afterwards in New Zealand was a keen Volunteer and Territorial Officer. His common sense and energy, combined with a disregard of personal danger, are to my mind his outstanding features. Common sense has been defined as the capacity of seeing things as they are, and doing things as they ought to be done, and this capacity General Russell possesses. His energy makes him a hard worker, and insists on his doing what is a vital necessity in warfare-seeing himself that his commands are carried out. I know there is a difference of opinion as to what extent a senior commander is justified in exposing himself, but I am convinced that his course is the right one. He has, in consequence, a first-hand knowledge of his sector that allows of no work being left undone, and no orders being disregarded, and, moreover, he sets a personal example of courage that cannot fail to inspire all ranks. Men very readily detect any tendency in their officers to look after their own safety, but no one more generously recognizes bravery than they do, and a contempt of danger is catching, even more, I believe, than its reverse. A very great share of whatever honour the Division has gained justly belongs to its Commander.

The Mounted Brigade severed its connection with us; the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the newly formed New Zealand Brigade, afterwards called the 3rd N.Z.R. Brigade, joined us from Cairo after the Campaign against the Senussi, and the Divisional Train and Battalion Transports reached us from Alexandria, where they had dwelt during the Gallipoli venture. In the process the camp of the Division crystallized around the Moascar Railway Siding, with its flanks on Ismailia and the Sweetwater Canal.

I am sure Ismailia was the first oasis. Completely surrounded by desert, this charming spot of shade and vividly green vegetation, with the Sweetwater Canal running through it and the Lake lapping its plantations, basks in the Egyptian sun, in which it alone seems to delight. It is a garden village, built by the Suez Canal Company, and the squalid native portion of it is small.

Fortunately for us, the Company Officials had founded a club, to which they kindly admitted us, an act of self-sacrifice, for the two services descended upon it and took complete possession. It was a pleasant end to the day sometimes to walk or ride in from Camp to tea, a hot bath, a game of billiards and dinner. A dignified man was the bath attendant, who, I rather suspect, was a Turk, and in his view his duty demanded that he should sit stolidly in the room while you had your tub. From the club it is a short distance to the Ismailia Gardens, with a botanical collection so good one would hardly expect to find it there, and a few monuments of ancient Egypt. Out of the Northern Exit a road runs through an avenue of trees to the Ferry across the Suez Canal : just before it reaches the Canal, a branch climbs the high ground on which stands the Canal Company's Hospital. From there, with the desert breeze in one's face, one can watch the steamers threading their way through the Canal, which loses itself in the waters of Lake Timsah, to regain its independence once more on the southern shore.

British warships passed in and out of The Lake, and on one occasion we played a game of Rugby with a team from the Navy. The ships assisted from the Canal in the bombardment of the Turks when the latter attacked it in the early part of 1915, and the spot on which the 2nd Brigade camped when it was first formed, carried on its surface a good deal of British steel sprinkled on the Turkish concentration there. This year also it was the general idea that the Turks would make another attempt; troops were concentrated in the Canal zone, and a great deal of work was done and money spent upon defences. Railways and roads were built, trenches dug and water-pipes laid. As can be imagined, trenches in the desert filled up almost as rapidly as they were completed. In January the Ruahine Company of the Battalion, under Captain Murray Urquhart, had to garrison one of the posts on the Canal, and its means of communication with the western bank consisted of a pontoon that the Turks had brought with them twelve months before. Later on, while in the 2nd Brigade, I rode round the outer posts held by our Mounted Brigade, and after my return to the 1st Battalion, helped to occupy the defences a mile or so across the Canal, so altogether I saw the whole system. To my mind, fighting over the hillocks of the desert possessed many of the characteristics of close-country fighting, even of night work. It was so extremely easy to lose direction and touch.

We were all glad to have the Transport back with the Battalion. The horses were installed between the tents and the Sweetwater Canal, and looked uncommonly well after their twelve months in Egypt. The loss of horses in France through the aerial bombing is one of the horrible features of the war. It is said that our Mounted Brigade in Palestine have with them even now quite a number of the horses originally brought from New Zealand. As a Company Commander, I was entitled to a horse, and I was rather concerned as to the animal I should be able to get. Seeing that the horse that Major Brunt, the first Commander of the Taranaki Company, had ridden was dead, I was, literally, in the air. Having a horse that you like makes a great difference, and I was very delighted when I was given the opportunity of trying Lieutenant-Colonel Malone's second charger, a pony of about fourteen hands called Billy, that he brought from Taranaki. Billy and I agreed to be friends, and we remained so until I had to part with him on joining the 2nd Battalion in April, 1917. He is still the charger of the Taranaki Company, 1st Battalion.

Some Sport, very near the top of the Divisional Staff, instituted a weekly paperchase on horseback, and every Saturday we followed the hounds over sandy hills, through native villages, across riverlets and any other obstacle the hares could discover. These runs kept the horses and ourselves fit, and were the greatest fun imaginable. At the opening meet the horses were tremendously excited, and quite a number of empty saddles showed up. It never occurred to any of the hares to tether a string of camels across the scent. Barbedwire entrenchments would not have been more formidable to the horses, who seemed to hate them with an enduring hate, and no wonder, for really they are fearsome-looking animals, with a horrid odour.

Leave to Cairo was not unobtainable, and two or three days among the Generals at Shepheard's took the dust of the desert away. It was said that one Colonial soldier, in a frantic endeavour to bring the number of officers of that rank at the hotel up to one hundred, masqueraded as a Brigadier for some weeks, until discovered by an Assistant Provost-Marshal. Some of the men preferred Suez or Port Said.

Of course, we were training all the time; the Army never rests when it is supposed to be resting. We went through the whole gamut from squad drill to divisional schemes. The older hands, with genuine fear in their hearts, recalled the Divisional days of their first winter in Egypt, and piously "went sick" on such occasions. Certainly the G.O.C. left nothing undone to fit us to meet a Turkish advance against the Canal: night concentrations and advances and defences, with daylight operations, followed by full discussion with all officers present. To the man in the ranks those days and nights were not the highest pleasure; a long, weary trudge through heavy sand, one minute banging into the four in front, the next straining every nerve to catch up. Telescoping was almost inevitable in the desert, with its alternating hard and soft patches of sand. There was not a great deal of room for individual work as far as the men were concerned. The commanders and their staffs were the ones to benefit, but, as is usual with our men, they took a keen, intelligent interest in all the manœuvres.

Curiously enough, their first winter in Egypt seemed to make more impression on the Main Body men than the exciting times they afterwards experienced. Their discussion of things on the march always wandered back to those days. I suppose the original brigades were composed largely of youngsters, and the voyage from New Zealand and Egypt itself were their first and most vivid impressions.

After the New Year we were reinforced by a good many sick and wounded from the English hospitals, and by the 7th and a small number of the 8th Reinforcements from New Zealand. At first there was a distinct cleavage in the ranks between those who joined prior to the 6th Reinforcement and the later comers. Of course, it disappeared in time, and one only recalls it because such a spirit, as far as I know, was never shown to the Reinforcements that reached us afterwards in France. I fancy it belonged to circumstances that caused Egypt to impress itself so vividly on the Main Body, and, further, during the early existence of the N.Z.E.F., most of its members had not lost the corners which appear on amateurs in every profession. We were amateur performers, and our awkwardness on the stage did not tend to make the life as comfortable for ourselves as was possible under the circumstances.

At the beginning of February, in accordance with the new policy of giving commissions in the field to non-commissioned officers and sending them back to New Zealand to train recruits, Company Sergeant-Major Bertrand was promoted Second Lieutenant, and Sergeant J. Makin became Company Sergeant-Major, Quartermaster-Sergeant Wood retaining his position at his own request. Shortly after, Corporal Quilliam, resigned the Company Clerkship and his stripes, Private E. D. Snell. being appointed in his place; Snell was then given the rank of Temporary Corporal. The duties of the Company Clerk on active service are so many and so responsible, that I made it a practice to give him two stripes, with the accompanying increase of pay so long as he held the position. Quilliam was promoted Lance-Corporal in France, and showed great promise as a non-cominissioned officer. He was a reserved boy, but zealous and very cool under fire, and, in consequence, had a great hold over his section. It was a great loss to the whole company when he was killed by a sniper one misty morning in the Bois Grenier sector.

Owing to the shortage of senior officers, I had been granted the temporary rank of Major on the Peninsula, and came in for the duties of Field Officer of the Day at various times. The tour of duty involved the inspection of the Divisional Guards, and anything else the A.A. and Q.M.G. might suggest. I remember on one occasion I had to visit the camp of a small unit temporarily attached to the division, of which the commanding officer had placed under close arrest for some disobedience of authority 120 out of a total of 130 men under his command, and the spectacle of the remaining ten guarding and controlling the delinquents was rather ridiculous.

About the beginning of February we learned that the idea of forming another New Zealand Infantry Brigade, and thus making a Division composed only of troops from the Dominion, had been approved by the War Office and our own Government. We should thus be able to take our share in the fighting on the Western Front, whither we then knew we were destined to go, as a homogeneous unit. The unit in this war has been the Division. The proposal, subsequently carried out, was to divide the officers of the battalions of the present New Zealand Infantry Brigade into two, and send half of them, with a portion of experienced non-commissioned officers, to form the nucleus of the four battalions of the new Brigade. The latter became the 2nd New Zealand Infantry Brigade, and the old Brigade was renamed the 1st New Zealand Infantry Brigade. The four Infantry Battalions became four Regiments, with their respective 1st Battalions in the 1st Brigade, and their 2nd Battalions in the 2nd Brigade. Colonel Braithwaite was promoted Brigadier-General to command the new formation, and Colonel Fulton, also promoted, was given the 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade.

Of the officers posted to the 2nd Battalion Wellington Regiment, it so happened that the two seniors, Major W. H. Cunningham and W. H. Fletcher, were both invalided in England, and I was given command of the new Battalion until either of them should return. I did not expect to be given the appointment, and it was a complete surprise when I received a message from General Braithwaite to call upon him. He was ill in bed in his tent at Moascar, and a great deal of the organizing work rendered necessary was done by him from there before he was able to get about again. He retained command of the 2nd Brigade until he left the New Zealand Division at the end of 1917, and always had the greatest pride in it. An impulsive man of great energy, with an immense capacity for detail, he made his personality felt through every unit of his command. A fund of human sympathy was responsible for many a kindly act, while an outspokenness, combined with perhaps a certain disregard for convention, made his doings and sayings a source of interest to the whole Division. His first Brigade Major was Major Melville, N.Z.S.C., *p.s.c.*, now Brigadier-General Melville, C.M.G., D.S.O. ; and his Staff Captain, Captain Puttick, now Lieutenant-Colonel Puttick, D.S.O.

The experience of forming the 2nd Battalion was extremely interesting, and I take credit for a suggestion, as to the number of non-commissioned officers to be transferred from the older Battalions, that was ultimately

adopted and proved satisfactory. As far as my choice of them was concerned, I was very much indebted to my fellow Company Commanders, who gave the new Battalion of their best, and I know that the other Wellington officers and myself who went over, were sure that the non-commissioned officers of our Battalion were easily the smartest in the new Brigade. Lieutenant G. S. Hume, N.Z..S.C. (now Major Hume, M.C.), was the first Adjutant; while Brigadier-General Braithwaite had himself chosen Second Lieutenants Browne and Machray as Quartermaster and Transport Officer respectively.

After two or three days in a camp alongside the old Brigade, we moved to a site some three miles east of the Suez Canal, there to act tactically as a support to the troops holding the front-line defences. It was a long way from civilization, and it said much for the energy and resourcefulness of the Brigade and Battalion Staffs that the organization was as advanced as it was when the men began to come in. The 8th and 9th Reinforcements formed the bulk of the drafts, with a good many mounted men and various details from the base. A number of mounted officers were also absorbed. If one were asked what was the dominating impression left from one's experience with the New Zealander as a soldier, I think I should say his enthusiasm. And the 2nd Brigade certainly had its full share of keenness and ardour in those early days. We had little material with which to make the sanitary part of the camp complete, and our Battalion Transport, apart from the few officers' chargers we had, consisted of two camels. Every morning at daybreak these camels appeared with their native drivers, disappearing into the desert in the evening. They never seemed to eat or drink, and where they lived Heaven alone knew. In spite of the drawbacks things soon took shape, as is the way with the Army, and training and organization proceeded apace. It was not long, however, before Major Fletcher returned from England, and, as I was only on loan, I gave up the command to him, and, with Billy, his groom and my batman, went back to the old Brigade. In the meantime, Major Cunningham, the senior Major of the Regiment, had been promoted Lieutenant-Colonel, and took over the 2nd Battalion when it reached France in April. His service on the Peninsula had brought him distinction and a Russian decoration of the Order of St. Stanislaus, to which, after the Somme, was added the D.S.O. My luck was out for once, because, with the formation of the Division, opportunity was taken to reduce the establishment of Majors in a Battalion from five to two in accordance with Imperial regulations, and, since I was the last on the list according to seniority, I reverted to Captain, and it was not until just before the Somme that I obtained my Majority again.

Two interesting events before our departure for France were, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales' visit on the 21st March while we were training and the Inspection of the Division in the desert by Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, K. C.B., C.V. O., D.S.O., on the 3rd of April. The Prince, in his inspection, rode round each Company without any formality. He sits his horse well, and, while his face possesses that curious attractiveness so noticeable in his photographs, it struck me there was a certain imperious strength that the photographs do not portray. He looks a Sahib. The 3rd of April must have been a proud day for Major-General Russell to see the New Zealand Division on parade for the first time, and the severity of the test that many had passed on the cliffs of Gallipoli no doubt strengthened his confidence in his command for the future.

From the middle of March the Egyptian sun grew hotter and hotter, and double tents were the aim of everybody to possess, while training in the middle of the day was avoided as much as possible. Contrary to expectation, a cool breeze from the desert generally blew during the most blazing days, and did not discount its kindness by raising the sand. It was the sand gale that brought misery into our lives and grit into everything. In those last few weeks the Company marched to the shore of Lake Timsah almost every day and bathed in its salt waters. What a sight it was ; at times probably two-thirds of a Division of men in the flush of youth and the pick of a young race of fine physique were there together on a beach that enforced no regulations as to dress. No doubt most of us railed against the fate that was to rob that race of these youngsters in. the next few weeks, for it was no mere gloomy prophecy that some would die. As I write, two years after, one could search the rolls in vain for most of their names. The men loved these bathes and were certain that they would miss them very much in France. They were right, and there was never a more popular and insistent rumour in later months than that the Division would winter in Egypt. However, they were glad to move, and, with a thrill of excitement in our hearts, we prepared to embark for the fields of France.

.

CHAPTER VI

FLANDERS

WE arrived in Marseilles early in the morning on April 13th. Ruahine Company (Major Fleming Ross), Taranaki Company and some Headquarters details, the whole under Major C. F. D. Cook, travelled by a comfortable boat taken off the African Trade. It was a peaceful voyage with the exception of our second inoculation against typhoid. The Medical Officer, in a genuine endeavour to save discomfort, injected the serum in what the Maories call my puku, with a result that neither he nor I anticipated. The slightest movement for five days was painfully punished, and I avoided the company of any humorist, for laughter was to be dreaded. The Company had lost Lieutenant Scott when the 2nd Brigade was formed, and the officers on landing in France were Captain A. H. Carrington, Lieutenants F. S. Varnham, G. M. Fell, L. H. Baily (detached for Battalion Transport duties), and Lockyer, and Second Lieutenant E. L. Malone. While Sergeant F. Farrington had been promoted. Quartermaster-Sergeant, *vice* Wood promoted Second Lieutenant and posted to the Hawke's Bay Company of the 1st Battalion. Second Lieutenant Malone was a son of the first Commanding Officer of the Regiment, and, on receiving a commission from the Wellington Mounted Rifles, elected to be posted to his father's old Battalion. His war service dated back to the Main Body of the N.Z.E.F.

An explanation of the nomenclature of the four Companies of the Battalion may perhaps be interesting. At the outbreak of war the 5th Regiment, less two Companies, were sent to Samoa, and when the Expeditionary Force for the Old World was enrolled, the remaining four Regiments of the Wellington Military District of the North Island, which Regiments constituted the Wellington Infantry Brigade, were each allowed to be represented by one Company in the Wellington Battalion of the Force. The four Companies were therefore called the Wellington West Coast, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki and Ruahine Companies, after the 7th, 9th, 11th and 17th Regiments, whose respective badges they wore. Unlike the Australian Imperial Force, the New Zealand Forces had no general badge.

Next morning, April 14th, we started on our railway journey of three days. It was more like a gipsy caravan tour, as we travelled night and day, stopping for an hour or two at places determined, I should imagine, by the residences of the driver and other officials. Sometimes we would stop in one of the larger French railway yards in the darkness of night that was only broken by the glare from the locomotives; at other times, perhaps in the early morning, our spell would be by country lanes. Then the safe side, of the train would be lined with men shaving in front of mirrors placed on the footboards of the carriages ; the lucky ones were able to persuade the engine driver to give them hot water, for the process ; we carried our rations and were given tea at the halts, but an hour by a railway buffet or a small village enabled us to emulate the locust of Egypt. The train was made up of ordinary carriages, and we turned them into sleepers as best we could. Major Cook was so tall that of necessity he was given one side to himself; my fate was always to share the other side with the Doctor. We had no accidents, and no absentees at the end of the trek, which was perhaps lucky, as no whistle was ever blown preparatory to the train starting: it simply moved on.

We gradually crept north; around the outskirts of Paris, through Amiens, Boulogne and Calais, until, with lights shaded, we reached Steenbecque, a few miles beyond Hazebrouck. In a drizzling rain we fell in, in the station yard, and, under our Interpreter's guidance, scattered ourselves by Sections and Platoons among the farmhouses in the area of Morbecque allotted to the Company. The last Section was housed an hour after midnight, and we then called up the two ladies whose house had been opened to the Taranaki officers.

It was our first practical experience of billeting anywhere, although we had studied its theory and lectured the men on the art. Billeting is the attraction, or perhaps the solace, of the fighting in Flanders. A tent is a lifeless abode, has nothing human about it, is always the same. But a billet may be anything from an empty ruin to a brewery, its owners may be churlish or ready to cook for you, and the village may be deserted or possess alluring Estaminets without number. "Billeting parties will report at Headquarters," was always a welcome order; it meant a move somewhere, either out of the line or on the way back to it, and a change is a change, whether from good to bad. Without the constant moves, the infantry soldier would have found his hard lot well nigh unbearable. With rare exceptions, our men behaved very well in billets. and were popular with the French. Unkind people might say their extra pay assured them a welcome from thrifty peasants whose profits and happiness were measured in sous, but I like to think that their honesty and high standard of conduct also earned a smile for the New Zealand hats when their wearers swung into a village at the end of a day's march. It was a standing order that all claims by the owners for any small damage to property should be settled before the departure of troops, and certainly such claims never erred on the side of timidity, but Monsieur le

Maire and the Interpreter cut them down pretty ruthlessly; however, I suppose the British Government was considered to be well able to afford it all.

The Billeting Party, consisting of the Battalion Billeting Officer, whose principal other duty was generally Intelligence and a Non-Commissioned Officer from each Company, would go ahead by twenty-four hours, or less, on bicycle or by train, and, meeting the Brigade Staff Captain in the Area, would receive a note of the district allotted to the Battalion. The officer would divide it up amongst the four Companies and Headquarters, whose Non-Commissioned Officers in turn distributed their Companies in the sub-areas. As troops had been billeted in most parts of the country, the Mayor's records of the holding capacity of the houses and barns were reliable and facilitated the work very much. The Mayoral records, however, took no account of the seasons, and after the harvest the barns were unavailable for billeting. Probably the party would finish just in time to meet the Battalion and guide the Companies to their quarters. The ideal billets for a Company included one for its Headquarters, that is, Officer Commanding, Second in Command, Sergeant-Major, Quartermaster-Sergeant, and his Assistant Q.M.S., Clerk and Runner, and the other officers with their batmen, the Mess Cook; and one each for the four Platoons at no great distance from Headquarters or from each other. If they were all fairly close together, the Company travelling kitchen or "cooker," as it is called, could cook for all Platoons; otherwise, the dixies would be distributed, and, with their one cook apiece, and an. assistant borrowed from one of the Sections for the time being, the Platoons did their own cooking. Of course, if the billets were very scattered, the Platoon Officers would billet with their men; on such occasions they generally managed to find a spare room in the house kept *pour l'officier*.

After a stay of a few days at Morbecque, the Company moved to "ideal" billets at Steenbecque, a mile or two away, where we remained for three weeks' training. There, Company Headquarters were in the château of a widow. Madame's son was home on leave from Verdun; and to an afternoon party in his honour, at which one of the guests was a retired French Colonel with numerous decorations, she invited one of my subalterns, who had a habit of becoming a great favourite with everyone, including his men. The household cellar, I may say, was a generous one. and, in spite of his lack of French, the subaltern managed to convey to the Colonel his desire to know the source of the decorations, but unfortunately received the impression, in return, that most of them had been won by jumping off the pier at Ostend to save trippers out of their depth. Not that it mattered much until later in the afternoon my officer endeavoured to show how clearly he understood things by giving a graphic imitation of swimming, first the breast and then the overarm strokes, I am afraid rather disconcerting the gallant old Colonel.

A Battalion travelling kitchen.

A digger's dugout in the trenches in Flanders.

Notre Dame, Armentières, 18th July, 1916.

Digging a strong point.

Duke of Connaught's inspection in Bailleul.

Wounded prisoners coming down WuIverghem-Messines road. 1917

Prisoners repairing Wulverghem-Messines road, June 7th, 1917.

Looking east at east edge of town on Warneton road.

In good billets and given fine weather, a Company makes rapid progress in its training. We had a very interesting Inter-Platoon competition. No. 9 Platoon (Lieutenant Lockyer) won both physical drill and rifle

exercises events, eventually pulling off the former at the Battalion test; while No. 11 Platoon (Lieutenant Fell) won the route marching. This Platoon had a Sergeant who set an excellent pace, and possessed only one man who could not keep step. There are always one or two men in a Platoon who, unfortunately, have no sense of time or some other kindred mental defect, and who find it an impossibility to follow the regular pace of their fellows. The result is a conscious or unconscious irritation to all but the offender, as regularity would seem to be essential to our brains. To anyone riding behind the Platoon, the head and shoulders of the one out of time with the rest were most apparent.

The French spring, to men who had spent eighteen months in barren places, was as clear waters to the thirsty soul. The Miniature Rifle Range was situated in a field at the foot of one of those wooded hillocks that further east would perhaps have been the scene of many a desperate struggle, but here in April was canopied with glorious green. Its people included a cuckoo, whose notes were new to us. It was on that range that Major Cook, of our Battalion, in charge of the Musketry Instruction, objected to "Right-oh!" as a classical word of command to commence firing. His greatest ambition was that we should do everything as well as it was humanly possible, and he exacted the same standard from himself.

In the middle of the merry month of May, we moved up to the trenches by way of Estaires and Armentières, taking over a Sector from the 7th Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment on the night of the 13th. Armentières was even then a dead city, and grass grew in some of its streets. Pompeii had been dead so long that one was not very impressed, but here was a city in which had lived 30,000 people but a few months ago. Now, one's footsteps on the pavements echoed through the roofless and windowless buildings on either side. In some streets a few of the inhabitants remained, making a very good living out of the troops, but they were eventually driven away by the bombardment of 1917.

The Brigade in Reserve was quartered in the town, and, by good fortune, my Company Headquarters were placed in a large house belonging to a Frenchman, whose name I recollect seeing on cotton reels in the old days. An old caretaker and his wife looked after the house and very beautiful grounds.

What enjoyment we found in its green lawns and shady paths on returning from the trenches! A hot bath, a change of clothes, and a stroll through the gardens were happiness indeed.

Gallipoli had not prepared us for the trenches of Flanders. At the outskirts of the town, by the railway, we dived into a neatly duck-walked trench that led us to the front line some two miles away. Its sunken route lay mostly through overgrown fields, incidentally passing by an asylum, over a road, and through a graveyard. It was a respectable entrance known at its top end as Lothian Avenue, but, to speak plainly, Localities 1, 2 and 3, which the Battalion took its turn at holding for the, next month or two, were disreputable to a degree; merely breastworks and parados of mud, for the sandbags had almost disappeared, with pools of filthy water in front and behind. in the localities themselves, earth dug-outs leaned drunkenly against the parapets. The pools sheltered tins and various kinds of other rubbish that had escaped the vigilant eyes of a succession of non-commissioned officers, and rats were everywhere, thin and fat, old and young. North and south the mud walls stretched as far as the eye could see, and across the paddock called No Man's Land a similar breastwork faced ours at a distance ranging from under 100 yards in some places to over 300 yards in others. And in these front-line trenches or others alike, in support and reserve trenches, and in billets in rear. the Division spent the next eleven months, excepting, of course, three weeks at the Somme, and the four weeks' training prior to that battle.

It was a stationary form of warfare. All the domestic arrangements were fixed. The transport brought rations up to Battalion Headquarters every evening, and one's Quartermaster-Sergeant followed with the daily paper and the letters. We cooked in the trenches and drew water from pumps or wells, and once or twice a week representatives from the Platoons would go back to the nearest village to buy extra food. Necessarily the sanitary arrangements were rather primitive, but all hands helped to keep the place as clean as possible,

A factory of some sort at Pont de Nieppe, a suburb of Armentières, had been commandeered to provide hot water baths, and the men used them at regular intervals. The bath people took charge of washing their underclothes, which were changed as the men went through. The actual baths were huge round wash tubs that held half a dozen men. At Estaires they were large concrete tanks, and at Citerne, on the way to the Somme, an overflow cistern to the factory was used in open air, and the men undressed and dressed in an orchard near by. It was surprising how easily a factory, whatever it manufactured, could provide hot baths.

The telephone was laid on to Company from Battalion Headquarters and very often from our supporting Artillery, and it was only latterly that its use was very much restricted owing to the introduction by the Germans of "listening sets" that could pick up telephonic conversations hundreds of yards away. Any hint to the enemy of a relief of the troops in the trenches being imminent was, of course, a heinous crime, although it was said that a distressed Company Commander, whose relief was interrupted by a heavy bombardment from the Hun Artillery, reported its ultimate completion by the message, "Very much relieved." Its use to ring up the Batteries for retaliation against annoyance from the enemy was quite legitimate, but it was too slow to be used for an S.O.S. call. As can be seen, the opposing trenches were so close together in places that it would only be a matter of minutes, maybe seconds, for a raiding party to get well across No Man's Land. In consequence, at night, our guns were left laid upon certain lines, and the sentinels standing by would simply fire without further ado upon seeing the S.O.S. rocket go up from the front line. Its light had no sooner died away than, with one roar, every gun in our area would let go. It was interesting to be waiting for a raiding party to leave a neighbouring sector. Our guns would not have started long, before numerous rockets would shoot up from the German lines, for all the world like startled animals quivering with fear.

The Sector had been looked upon as one of the quiet places of the line before the N.Z. Division took it over, but I am afraid we spoiled. it. I presume it was principally due to the policy of General Headquarters to create as much diversion as possible on other parts of the front than the Somme, and partly to our men not being of the type that can sit down and do nothing. It may be they are like children, and cannot possess a toy without playing with it. However. the Artillery must needs fire every round they could get; the "Plum Pudding" Batteries were tremendously proud of what they could do, and of course there was no better weapon than the Stokes Mortar, for which, unfortunately, there was unlimited ammunition, so, between them all, home was no longer like home. The German could not allow it to go with out retaliation, but he got more than he gave.

The three Brigades of the Division made a great many raids in the months before the Somme. The 1st Battalion, Wellington Regiment, carried out a very successful one in the early morning of the 2nd July, made under the Adjutant, Captain A. B. McColl, who, to our great grief, was killed by a machine-gun bullet when the raid was practically all over. He had returned to our trenches safely, and went back again, with unselfish courage, to help the stretcherbearers in No Man's Land. The plan was carefully laid, and the party of four officers (Captain McColl, Lieutenant C. B. Lockyer, Second Lieutenant S. G. Guthrie and Second Lieutenant R. Wood) and seventy-six other ranks, chosen from all the Companies of the Battalion, had been withdrawn from the line for several weeks' special training. Before midnight all moved silently out of a sally-port in the breastwork and took up a position in front of the point in the German trench that had been selected for assault. Precisely at 12.30 a.m. our artillery and medium (Plum Puddings) and light (Stokes) Trench Mortars opened a devastating fire on the trench and wire in front of it, the bombardment lasting twenty minutes. The trench mortars then ceased firing and the artillery lifted on to the back trenches. The guns were so laid that the exploding shells formed a semicircular wall of fire, technically known as "a box barrage," to prevent reinforcements being sent from the rear to assist the garrison of the trenches enclosed in the barrage. Directly the preliminary bombardment finished, the party rushed across the broken wire, and sections of it entered the trench. The remainder stayed in No Man's Land to act as covering parties against disturbance from the flanks and to take charge of prisoners handed over the parapet. The garrison seemed to be dazed with our bombardment and offered little resistance. Ten were made prisoners, and all of the remainder that could be seen were killed.Poor wretches, they were surprised with their packs on their backs, and, no doubt, would have been relieved by an incoming battalion in the next few minutes had not our plans decided otherwise. Eight minutes were allowed in the enemy lines, and on a whistle-blast our men swarmed back over the parapet. Apparently the Hun Artillery were unable to locate the point raided in time, because their retaliation, which was heavy, came down on most of our trenches, but happily left No Man's Land free for the return of our party. Our casualties were, besides Captain McColl, one man killed and nine wounded of the Raiding Party, and one killed and four wounded of the remainder of the Battalion, while manning the trenches during the raid. McColl was a severe loss to us. The first report was that he had been wounded only slightly, and it so happened that I was the one to bring the bad news to Headquarters, having passed the old stretcher-bearer Corporal and one of his assistants carrying him down Lothian Avenue. In the breaking daylight he looked as if, tired out, he had fallen asleep with a smile on his face. He was a great big handsome fellow, although in years only a boy, with a big man's heart.

I fancy he loved the excitement of a fight. I had seen him a few minutes before they went into No Man's Land, and, as usual, a joke bubbled out of him. Any of us that knew McColl, will carry to the end the memory of a very gallant gentleman.

Raids were inevitable in trench warfare; but were risky enterprises. The one I have described was highly successful, as I believe most of those undertaken by the Division were, but it was not so with all. One, launched with fairly large numbers, was caught by the Hun Artillery in No Man's Land before our own bombardment commenced and the consequences were disastrous. It was suggested that some of its members had been indiscreet in billets, and had given the plans away, but there was always the risk of an enemy patrol stumbling upon them massed for attack and giving the alarm. In another case, the German gunners evidently received early accurate information as to the locality of the raid, and made the return of our people across No Man's Land a costly business. To find the wire uncut and the garrison undisturbed by our bombardment, was probably due to insufficient artillery preparation, and therefore our own fault. In most cases the raids had to be executed at night, in order to obtain the element of surprise and the cover that darkness gives to the Raiding Party across No Man's Land, and, in consequence, shared the grave disadvantages always attached to night operations. In no other kind of work are skilful planning and careful co-operation between the troops engaged more necessary.

The latter part of the three months that the Division spent in the Armentières trenches was so filled with raids, dummy raids, trench mortar strafes and gas attacks, actual and threatened, that it was really with a feeling of relief, we handed over possession to troops who themselves had just been through the burning fiery furnace of the Somme, and turned our faces southward.

.

CHAPTER VII

THE SOMME

A COMPANY on active service is like the shifting sands on the seashore; the officers and non-commissioned officers, in common with the remainder, come and go, here to-day, there to-morrow. Fortunate is the Company that retains an officer for any length of time ; because with the officers and men strange to each other, its efficiency is impaired and often the men's happiness endangered. Justice is easier when the superior knows the idiosyncrasies and characteristics of his subordinates, and, moreover, there is lacking that relationship, sometimes stronger even than a blood-tie, which is born between officers and men who have been through a great deal together. It is said the French General addresses his Battalions as his children ; a Company Commander thinks of them as such. And really men in a body under control have much of the helplessness of infants. Of a necessity they cannot do many things for themselves; they cannot provide their own food or clothing, make or arrange for shelter or baths, attempt to remedy troubles, and in a hundred and one ways are dependent on the care and solicitude of their officers. Their very happiness is often in their superior's keeping, for some men are sensitive, and such a little thing as neglecting, in a fit of absent-mindedness, to return a salute, may be interpreted as the sign of his ill-will, and brooded over. A great many of them have been independent of control before the war and find it easy to imagine under military conditions that their superiors have a down on them.

The Company had its share of changes, and its officers on the 15th September were Lieutenant Varnham and Second Lieutenants McIsaac, Gray, Patchett and Farrington, besides myself. In the meantime, Captains A. H. Carrington, E. S. Harston and W. J. Shepherd had left us for Brigade Headquarters, Wellington West Coast Company and Hawke's Bay Company respectively ; Lieutenant Lockyer had also been transferred to Wellington West Coast Company, and Lieutenant Fell and Second Lieutenant Malone had been evacuated to Hospital. I had been to Hospital myself, and in my absence Captain R. F. Gambrill, from Hawke's Bay Company, had commanded the Company for a little while, and Lieutenant Varnham. for the remainder of the time. The latter was building upon the foundation of success he had laid in Gallipoli, and was given the position of Adjutant temporarily after Captain McColl's death, until Captain R. W. Wrightson took over, and after that went to the Second Army School at Wisques for a month's course. All ranks were glad to see him return on our way to the Somme, and it was with a sincere feeling of regret that we had to part with him on transfer to the Wellington West Coast Company at the beginning of October.

In later days an endeavour was made to prevent changes, to some slight extent, by appointing the Company Sergeant-Major and Quartermaster-Sergeant for, say, six and nine months, and keeping them out of active fighting, such as the Somme and Messines. It was an effort to secure a permanency of command. The former

is a very important person, whose influence in the Company is far-reaching. The Company was very fortunate in having a succession of such men as J. Makin, F. Farrington, J. McSaveney, and C. B. Lepper, as Sergeants-Major. The first-named was wounded on July 18th, while out on patrol in front of Bois Grenier ; Farrington was promoted and posted to the Company as a Second Lieutenant, and McSaveney was drafted to the Oxford O.T.C. for his commission a short time before; Makin returned in December. Lepper had gained a Military Medal on Gallipoli and held the position temporarily while McSaveney was at school. He also was promoted Second Lieutenant in 1917, and sent back to New Zealand to train reinforcements.

The Battalion left the trenches on August 15th, and the period between that date and September 8th, when it reached Dernancourt, was spent in travelling to the Somme by railway and road, and in training on the way. Altogether seven days were occupied on the journey. Lieutenant-Colonel Hart devoted considerable care to improving the standard of Road Discipline, and he had reason to be proud of the result. It is a big responsibility moving a Battalion with its transport, and the neglect of such points as the correct adjustment of packs, setting the right pace, care of the feet, use of the Band, and many others, may mean that one or two men fall out, to be followed by more whose spirit of endurance is not quite so high as their fellows, and before a Commanding Officer realizes it, a rot has set in. Route Marching is a severe test of the discipline and organization of a Company or Battalion. A trained chiropodist is on the strength of all Battalions, and a most useful person he is.

In the trenches the duties of the officers were more those of Naval men ; they had their regular watches in charge of the whole Company, and their time was so taken up thereby that in effect their Platoons had to be handed over to the Platoon Sergeants. Once away from Trench life, they were able to devote their whole time to their own commands, and both the men and themselves liked it much better.

A halt of twelve days was made at a village, Battalion Headquarters being two kilometres away. The Company was billeted in the courtyard of a château, and as it was much like a barrack square, we were more independent of the weather than the other Companies. There I received word of my promotion to Major. In the twelve days a great deal of training was done, all on open fighting principles ; games and sports loosened the men's muscles, stiff from the trenches, for it must be remembered that the majority of these boys had not broken from a walk into a run for three months. The Army games were wonderful. I call them Army, but they were no more than schoolboy games, with no expensive material needed. And yet they called forth all the agility and quickness of thought we possess, and were enjoyed with an enthusiasm and accompanied by laughter that it was splendid to see and hear. The man whose idea introduced them to the Army was a genius. They were the chief means of making the men as fit as they were when they went into the Somme.

The Company possessed a number of men with good voices, and gave several excellent concerts under the shade of Madame's trees.

During part of the trek an experiment was made with Prohibition, and orders were issued forbidding the men to consume any liquor for the time being. Unfortunately, before its results could be viewed with any certainty, the experiment had to be abandoned. There were times when the sorely-tried officers asked why the British Army had not dared to do what America has since done in France, and, in company with Canada, in both of their own countries ; but that is High Politics. As in civil life, crime in the Army is principally due to drink.

At Dernancourt we remained for two days. Lieutenant-General Sir Alexander Godley, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., inspected the Battalion while training in a paddock that still held its grain in stocks, and wished us good luck. For the purposes of the battle the Division was transferred temporarily from the 2nd Anzac Corps to the 15th Corps. The Army and Corps Commanders and their Staffs retained the direction and control of that long-drawn-out struggle, Divisions alone being moved from other fronts. General Godley, in his dual position of Corps Commander and Commandant of the N.Z.E.F., was careful to show the men the interest he felt in the Force, and generally before and after an engagement of any importance he found time to address the officers and men of the Brigades, and sometimes Battalions, concerned. No doubt in his heart there was the softest spot for the 1st Brigade, which had fought under him as Divisional Commander on Gallipoli. After the General's inspection, the whole Battalion bathed in the little River Ancre, a name that will go down in the histories of four or five nations, and perhaps of more, before the war is finished.

The following day the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Wellington Regiment paraded together for the first time at Church Service. Unfortunately Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Cunningham could not be present, and in his absence Major Fletcher commanded the 2nd Battalion. The same evening we moved on to Fricourt, that was.

to serve as our advanced Base. The scene in the area behind the lines was very remarkable. Every inch of ground for miles seemed to be occupied by troops in tents, huts and improvised shelters, and the roads were busy thoroughfares : lorries, guns, transport, horses and men were thick, coming and going, but the traffic was so methodically regulated that there was little confusion. In those days the Hun had not followed our example of bombing back areas, and we were spared many anxious moments in consequence.

September the 15th was the day fixed for another attempt to capture High Wood and to advance on a wide battle-front. This time the infantry were to be assisted by Tanks, faint rumours of which had already reached us, only to be dismissed with incredulity. However, at Fricourt we were convinced by the evidence of our senses. In a flat near Braye were Tanks by the dozen huddled together like monstrous, horrible tortoises; they were still more uncanny when they moved, with a slow, ungainly gait suggestive of Nemesis. The first view of these Juggernauts created an impression as vivid as any I can recall. The objectives assigned to the New Zealand Division were, firstly, a portion of the then famous Switch Trench between Delville and High Woods, and, secondly, half of the village of Flers, with part of the Flers Trench and Flers Support Trench. The 41st Division was to attack on our right and a London Division on our left. Within the Division, the capture of Switch Trench was assigned to the 2nd Battalions of the Auckland, Otago and Canterbury Regiments of the 2nd Brigade, the 2nd Battalion of the Wellington Regiment being held in reserve, and the remaining objectives to the 3rd New Zealand Ride Brigade. The 1st Brigade formed the Divisional Reserve. That important factor in Success, ensuring that every man knows what is demanded of him, was given its due weight by means of Plans, Staff Memoranda, Conferences and Addresses, and such Reconnaissance as was possible was carried out. The remaining days before the 15th were spent in further training and in providing fatigue parties in the trenches, and on the clear and frosty evening of the 14th the Battalion moved up to the outskirts of Mametz Wood, bivouacking in shellholes in the field. Much to his disgust, Captain Varnham had to stay behind with those kept out of the engagement, and Lieutenant Patchett was detached as Battalion Burial Officer. It was an excellent system, reserving a nucleus for reorganization. in case of heavy losses, and there were, in addition, some important fellows, such as Battalion Orderly Room Sergeant and Company Clerks, who were not allowed in action under any circumstances.

Not long after the barrage commenced. good news began to filter back with the wounded, and that welcome sign showed itself of German prisoners being escorted down the road past our bivouac. The Taranaki Company was to be in Battalion Reserve for the first part of the Battle, and early in the morning was called upon to provide two parties, one of twenty-five other ranks under Lieutenant McIsaac to carry grenades, and the other of forty to assist in making a new road from Mametz to Longueval. Then at 1 p.m. the remainder of the Company received orders to move to Green Dump near Longueval and there provide more Carrying Parties. It was, however, to retain its organization, so that it would be ready to fight on the following day if required. A Dump is a spot where food, water, stores or munitions of any kind are collected, and to Green Dump, on the British side of the Crest that looked down the slope to Flers, we wended our way.

Marching as on a road was, of course, impossible across fields or in shell-pitted country. The Dump was a scene of activity, with a big Dressing Station close by to add to its importance, and not long after piling some of their gear and having something to eat, two parties of fifty-seven and fifty-one, under Second Lieutenants Gray and Farrington, disappeared over the hill, laden with barbed wire and other R.E. Stores, to build Strong Points beyond Switch Trench.

As I had nothing to do after lunch, I followed in the direction they had gone. The high ground, by Advanced Brigade Headquarters in Carlton Trench, gave a clear view of the Battle Ground, Delville Wood on the right, Switch Trench and the ill-fated High Wood on the left. Flers itself was hidden in the fold of the ground, but the ridge between it and the village of Eaucourt l'Abbaye to the west showed up plainly. The German communication, trench, Goose Alley, ran back along this ridge from Flers Trench to the uncompleted Gird Trench that the enemy had partially dug to protect the village of Gueudecourt. I walked over part of the country we had just won. The tide of battle had ebbed, and in front of me a sullen, angry barrage from the German Howitzers was playing on the trenches that the enemy knew by now he had lost. Here and there were laden parties in single file threading their way through the barrage, and, as one could see through the glasses, paying the toll of thoroughfare as they went. In smaller numbers were stretcher-bearers and wounded men painfully struggling back. But the ground itself caught and held one's attention. Shells from our largest guns had burst in it for weeks past, and so closely had they fallen that two men could not walk abreast on unbroken ground for more than a few yards. In the captured trenches lay German dead side by side and in heaps, while scattered everywhere were unburied corpses. Above all floated the stench of carrion flesh.

Later in the afternoon, Company Headquarters moved a little way down the hill from. Green Dump into Check Trench. Thence I was summoned to Battalion Headquarters to stand by for orders. A wonderful cup of tea and forty winks carried us Company Commanders on till midnight, when the Commanding Officer came back from Brigade. The Rifle Brigade, with some English troops and a Tank, had captured Flers village and, reinforced by some Companies of the 2nd Battalion of our Regiment, were holding on. Our Battalion had to continue the advance at 9.35 a.m. and take Grove Alley, another German communication trench from Flers Trench to Factory Corner and Gird Trench. Grove Alley lay, between Flers and Goose Alley, and its capture would assist a further advance against the latter trench. Hawke's Bay and Ruahine were to attack, with Wellington West Coast in Support and Taranaki in Reserve.

The Runner and I groped our way back in the dark to the Company dug-out, whereI found Gray and Farrington. The latter's party had not fared so badly, but Gray's had come under a concentration of fire and suffered rather heavily. Our casualties for the day were two killed, eight wounded, and Lance-Corporal A. G. Ellis missing. Ellis was severely injured in the legs, and must have been blown up by a shell as he lay waiting for the stretcher-bearers. or perhaps as he was being carried back. He was a fine fellow, quiet and modest, thorough in his work and possessing the capacity for leadership. Lance-Corporal F. J. Jones was recommended for his good work that afternoon in helping to keep the party together and assisting the wounded. The batmen had supper ready, after which we lay down for an hour.

We came up from the dug-out into a clear, frosty night, and, assembling the Company. moved up the slope to where the Battalion massed. From there to the outskirts of Flers it moved in single file, winding round the edges of the shell-holes over country that presented no guiding features at night. It was vitally important to be in position before daylight, and the Commanding Officer must have spent an anxious time until we reached Flers just as dawn was breaking. Fortunately the Hun barrage ceased its troubling some time after midnight. and, with the exception of a few gas-shells, our progress was undisturbed. Near the village the Taranaki Company separated from the Battalion and took up a position in Flers Trench, which, some two hundred yards away, ran round the village on the British side. Here we found the 2nd Battalion of' the Rifle Brigade.

By a curious coincidence, the Germans counter-attacked our right flank at 9.30 a.m., and although our fellows, assisted by a Tank that was lurching forward to take part in the engagement, had no difficulty in stopping them, it entailed the unfortunate consequence that when they had to advance at 9.35 a.m., for the barrage is like time and tide, they ran into the Hun barrage and suffered more casualties than would ordinarily follow such an operation. The "Creeping Barrage" had been further developed since Sir Henry Horne introduced it at the beginning of the Somme Battle on July 1st, and in September it was an instrument of precision. The guns of lighter calibre were laid on to fixed lines for certain periods, at the close of which they lifted on to the other lines, in advance. As the line of exploding shells moved forward, so the extended infantry advanced. The success of the process depended on careful plotting and accurate gun-laying; the gunners being obliged to shoot from the map. As far as the infantry were concerned, they strove to follow immediately behind our shells, for, of course, the main object of the scheme was to keep the enemy machine-gunners down until our infantry was able to spring upon them. What an unforgivable crime it was for troops to be late for the Barrage, is plain. The Stationary Barrage was another affair---the business of the heavier guns, Howitzers chiefly, who simply laid on to their unfortunate targets until they levelled them to the ground.

Ruahine and Hawke's Bay took the objective without great opposition, although Hawke's Bay Company had a tussle for a part of it on the right, which gave its Commander, Captain F. K. Turnbull, M.C., an opportunity of organizing and leading a small bombing party, who put the matter beyond doubt. Wellington West Coast Company were called upon for two Platoons to assist in holding the right flank of the captured position, and from Flers Trench we could see them enter the village at the double on their way to the line.

We remained in our respective positions until the night of the 18th-19th September, when we were relieved. Holding on in trenches is expensive, as the enemy artillery bombard them night and day. During a big engagement, such as the Somme was, the guns are silent only during an hour or two out of the twenty-four. As a rule, just about dawn, there is a comparative cessation of fire. It was a decided consolation to hear our shells sighing overhead on their way to the Huns, and to feel that for every one we received we gave back five. During the time I was at the Somme our airmen seemed to blindfold the Hun and then point out his whereabouts to our gunners, who hammered him to a pulp. Taranaki Company was not called upon to hold the front line at all, but had a good deal to do in carrying and working parties. The faithful execution of such

duties necessitates resolution and indifference to danger, and failure entails serious consequences. A Party meets with heavy shell-fire and decides it can go no further with its load, and the front-line troops are left without food, water or ammunition; in such beginnings is found disaster.

The fine weather broke on the 18th, and the march back to Green Dump was arduous. The Companies moved independently: indeed, it was difficult keeping even a Company together. That night stands out vividly in one's memory. It was raining steadily: pitch dark, and, until the flashes of the shells lighted up the long string of heavily-laden men moving slowly over slippery, muddy ground, only the forms of a few immediately in front could be distinguished. Waits were innumerable, caused by meeting troops moving up to the trenches or overtaking others going back, transports and artillery, with the drivers cursing the unfortunate animals that stuck in the slime at every. step. At one point we filed past an Advanced Dressing Station, where many helpless wounded were still lying on stretchers, soaked with the rain. Everywhere we passed unburied corpses, bodies of mules and horses and broken limbers, and the Stench followed us.

The three days had cost the Battalion in killed, wounded and missing, 10 officers and 282 other ranks. Our losses in officers included two Company Commanders, Major Fleming Ross and Captain H. S. Tremewan killed. Lieutenant McIsaac and myself were both slightly wounded, but were able to carry on. Lieutenant Patchett suffered a very severe concussion from a shell, and was also wounded in the arm and had to be evacuated. The casualties in the Taranaki Company were 11 killed and 33 wounded.

We lay in Check Trench until the night of September 24th; the weather fine. In the interval we reorganized and commenced to train Lewis Gunners and Bombers, as our losses had been heavy amongst those specialists, and incidentally practised an attack by the Company upon a German Strong Point between Grove Alley and Factory Corner. It was the turn of the other three Battalions of the Brigade to make the next advance, but the Brigadier had it in his mind for one Company of the 1st Battalion. Wellington Regiment, to take this Strong Point instead of the Canterburys capturing it in their stride towards Factory Corner. The Taranaki Company were anxious to have the job, as we had been in reserve at Grove Alley, but eventually the latter course was adopted, and we had to be content to wait for the next piece of work that might be given to us.

At 9.45 p.m. the Battalion sallied forth once more, and this time all four Companies clambered into Flers Trench behind the village. In the meantime the Divisional Pioneers had dug a very fine Communication Trench towards Flers, and, in consequence, part of the whole journey of about two miles was done in comparative comfort. The next day, 25th September, at 12.35 p.m., in clear, fine weather, the Canterbury, Auckland and Otago Battalions of the 1st Brigade captured Factory Corner and a part of Goose Alley. From Flers Trench the attack on Goose Alley by the Otagos was clearly seen, and a most inspiriting sight it was. The men seemed to saunter along behind our barrage as if out mushroom hunting. Apparently, after the attack, that Battalion held Goose Alley from Abbaye Road on the right to where it intersected Flers Support Trench on the left. On their left flank were the 1st Battalion of the Black Watch, who were in Flers Support Trench and Flers Trench for a distance beyond Goose Alley of about 200 yards, where they were separated from the Germans merely by Blocks in both trenches.

At 5 p.m. I received orders to place myself under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Charters, C.M.G., commanding the Otago Battalion, and relieve the Company of the Black Watch holding Flers Support Trench and the portion of Goose Alley between the two Flers Trenches. I accordingly went on ahead to report to Lieutenant-Colonel Charters and the Commanding Officer of the Black Watch, leaving the Company to follow on. The latter officer was very complimentary concerning the advance of the Otago men in the afternoon.

The 1st Battalion of the King's Royal Rifles relieved the Black Watch in the Flers Trench shortly after we took over Flers Support, and the position was then that two arms, about 200 yards in length, projecting out of Goose Alley, were held by British Troops, and the two arms coining from the opposite directions by the Germans. Portions of, approximately, 40 yards in the middle of the arms became No Man's Land. It was very much as if there were two Tower Bridges side by side, that, after being raised, were towered only to find that they no longer met in the centre. There had been a good deal of bombing done on both sides at the Block in Flers Support, and on arrival there I found some Otago men that had voluntarily come along to take a hand with their Scotch cousins. Heavy fighting during the past few hours was apparent from the numerous German and British dead. In the triangle formed by Flers Support and Goose Alley were a number of Black Watch

men, shot down as they advanced in a perfect line. It was like a picture of stooks in a field, some lying, others kneeling, and one even standing in the rigid stillness of death.

At 2.55 a.m. orders came from Lieutenant-Colonel Charters that the K.R. Rifles were advancing further along Flers Trench, and that we were to occupy any of Flers Support in front of us which was unoccupied or weakly held by the enemy. At zero time, Lance-Corporal T. McGuire, with No. 11 Platoon Bombers, reconnoitred the Block, and, by the light of the German flares, saw that both the trench and surrounding shellholes were fully manned for defence. His reconnaissance was confirmed by Lieutenant Gray, who reported that they must have been the originals of one of Bairnsfather's drawings, with their round caps, staring eyes and hair standing on end. The Englishmen met with little resistance, and occupied 150 yards more of Flers Trench and half of a communication trench that joined up the two. They thus threatened the rear of the enemy in front of us, and so helped us in the work of next evening. Our efforts were confined to directing Stokes Mortar fire on to the Block, with some result as we discovered later.

The Company diary, under date September 26th, says: "All night and during next day the Germans bombarded us intermittently with H.E. At 12.30 p.m. an attack was commenced by English or Canadian Troops on our extreme left, and the bombardment of our position by the enemy was intensified, Acting Sergeant-Major Dawson and Private Howell being killed, and Private Parker (Company Runner) wounded. We continued work, cleaning up and deepening trenches. Intermittent bombardment by High Explosive continued all day, and in the afternoon one shell killed Corporal C. A. Rogers, Lance-Corporal Otto and Private Ford. wounding Second Lieutenant Gray." Corporal Rogers had been recommended for the Military Medal for his work during the first few days of the battle, and his death was a severe loss to the Company.

Later in the afternoon I received permission to co-operate fully in a further advance along Flers Trench contemplated by our neighbours. At 6.30 p.m. our Barrage came down, and No. 11 Bombers, under Lance-Corporal McGuire, followed by the rest of No. 11 Platoon, the whole under Sergeant A. Quinlan, had no trouble in working down Flers Support, driving the enemy beyond its junction with the communication trench, part of which had been taken by the K.R.R. in the morning. There they encountered a well-defended strong point, and carried it with bombs, the garrison retiring further down the trench to another communication trench some distance away. As the Rifles, however, met with strong opposition and could not advance, Quinlan, in obedience to orders, withdrew to the first communication trench, put in a fresh block and established posts. As the Company was limited to one recommendation for this affair, Quinlan and McGuire tossed up for it (a highly irregular proceeding), and the latter won. In due course he was decorated with the Military Medal.

The Company was relieved at midnight by C Company of the 4th Battalion of the N.Z.R.B., and in the clear moonlight moved down Flers Support Trench as far as the valley and then turned to the left up North Road, to where it crosses Abbaye Road. Here we lay down on our waterproof sheets on the bare, frosty ground until dawn. The men were so tired with want of sleep that they dropped off in an instant, and it was a difficult matter to wake them an hour or two later. The Sergeant-Major had to steel his heart to post sentries over the Company while it slept. Lack of sleep is no doubt one of the most serious of conditions that make a modern battle so exhausting to the troops.

We had now left the Otagos and come under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Young, C.M.G., D.S.O., whose Battalion (1st Battalion Canterbury Regiment) was to advance later on in the day (September 27th) from Factory Corner against Gird Trench. Irish Troops were advancing on his right, and on his left the 1st Battalion Auckland Regiment, and the 1st Battalion Otago Regiment had orders to attack the Gird Trench to its junction with Goose Alley and the remaining portion of Goose Alley, held by the enemy. My orders were to move up from North Road with three Platoons, and occupy the Assembly Trenches vacated by the Canterbury men when they advanced to attack: we would there be available as a reserve in Lieutenant-Colonel Young's hands.

At dawn a very sleepy body of men moved further along the Road, and occupied a Strong Point and some dug-outs in the bank on one of its sides. My Headquarters were in a German deep dug-out. By the steps leading into it lay an Aucklander, who, evidently on his way to the Dressing Station on the 25th, could go no further and lay down to die. He wore the ribbons of the King's and Queen's South African Medals, and looked as if dying had been no grief to him. I cut a button off his tunic and have worn it ever since as a talisman. As it was No. 11 Platoon's turn to remain in reserve, the leaders of Nos. 9, 10 and 12, Lieutenant McIsaac,

Sergeant R. W. Richardson, and Corporal G. J. Highly and myself reported to Lieutenant-Colonel Young at his Headquarters in the Main Building at Factory Corner and received our instructions. It is true the Main Building was only a shadow of its former self, but its supremacy in the tiny village was now unchallenged. The guns had sided with it, and the other houses were brick heaps. Lieutenant Farrington's lot was to remain behind with No. 11, and at 2.15 p.m., at which moment all the guns in Picardy seemed to speak, the rest of us hurried through the German Barrage to Factory Corner as fast as our legs would carry us, expecting every tenth of a second to be our last. As No. 10 Platoon was assembling, an enemy shell burst amongst it, but Sergeant Richardson kept his men together and got away to time. Our casualties on this occasion, although heavy enough, were light under the circumstances. The Canterbury Battalion took its objectives with a dash that was quite its own, and we were not called upon except to assist in digging trenches and evacuating the wounded. The position on the right was also good, but on the left the Auckland and Otago Battalions were unable to carry the whole of their objectives, leaving in the hands of the Germans a triangle of which the apex was the junction of Gird Trench and Goose Alley, and two sides were portions of those trenches. These Battalions met with uncut wire, and, coming under a murderous machine-gun fire from the direction of Eaucourt l'Abbaye and Warlencourt, suffered heavy casualties. That evening Ruahine and Hawke's Bay Companies moved into Goose Alley, the former, after dark, being sent over the open to the right to occupy Gird Trench east of its junction with Goose Alley. Battalion Headquarters also shifted to North Road, and Wellington West Coast Company to a sunken road between North Road and the Triangle. A further attempt was contemplated for that night to carry the Triangle, but some of the troops that were to take part in it did not arrive in time, and the attack was cancelled. A Tank was also to be a combatant, and, McIsaac and Farrington spent a most uncomfortable night at the Cross Roads at Factory Corner waiting to guide it to the Assembly Point. However, no Tank appeared. Next day Lieutenant-Colonel Hart, to whom these operations had been entrusted, reconnoitred the position and reported to Brigade that the Triangle had a saucer formation and was untenable by either side. On his recommendation, the idea of further action was abandoned, but the existing positions were consolidated and connected up by new trenches.

We were relieved at 8.30 p.m. on the 28th, and, collecting No. 11 Platoon in North Road, and reporting to Lieutenant-Colonel Hart, under whose orders we came once more, we made back to Green Dump and Carlton Trench. It was understood that the Division was now to be relieved, and our spirits ran high. I am afraid that troops who ask to be sent back into the encounter are uncommon. Go anywhere they are asked, they will, and without a murmur, but once their job is done and their faces turned in a direction away from the conflict, the feeling is one of intense relief from a strain to which even the steadiest nerves must confess. Our hopes, however, were disappointed, and three days later we went back into the trenches : this time only for twenty-four hours, and, when we were finally relieved by the 26th Battalion of the City of London Fusiliers in the early morning of the 4th October, we marched right out to Pommiers Redoubt. The weather was getting steadily worse, and the awful state of the ground made the march to the trenches and out again very trying. The last few miles were leagues to me as I had been granted special leave to England, and it was only an hour or two after the Company reached Pommiers Redoubt that I handed it over to Captain W. H. Hawkins and departed.

CHAPTER VIII

SAILLY

I REJOINED the Battalion on October 15th in the Cordonneric Sector, full of the usual "After leave depression," accentuated by the fact that the period of leave was increased to from eight to ten days while I was on the way back. It was a Sector with a frontage of about 1,500 yards, divided into three Sub-sectors, and the Commanding Officer accordingly stationed three Companies in the Front Line and Supports and the fourth in Reserve Trenches a short distance in rear. The Battalion held the Line for eight days, and then interchanged with the 1st Battalion, Otago Regiment, in billets a mile or two away. After eight days there we returned to the Trenches for another tour of duty, and this regular life continued for two months until the whole Brigade was relieved and went into Reserve for sixteen days' training. In the meantime Canterbury and Auckland carried on the same system on our right.

We were given to understand the Division would be in the area for the whole of the winter, and we worked on the trenches and billets as if they were our own property. It had the name of being very wet the winter before, and drainage was said to be difficult owing to there being insufficient fall. However, the levels were taken again, disclosing a greater fall than was expected, and a systematic programme of work embarked upon that dealt with the problem from the Front Line back to the River Lys. Old ditches and drains were cleared and new canals dug, and when the rain descended upon us, rather earlier than anticipated, the Engineers were satisfied with the result. The Front and Support Trenches were dry and one communication trench.

On the dug-outs and breastworks, work was also concentrated; cookhouses were built, and duck-walks laid along the floors of the, trenches. This necessitated, a lavish use of material, timber, iron, concrete, wire netting, etc., but shelter and protection were demanded and the wherewithal was forthcoming. Among the heirlooms of the Battalion Sector was a "Deep Dug-out." There are Deep Dug-outs of various kinds, but this was one of the Deepest Dye, and was planned to hold 250 men at a very low level. There was a hot difference of opinion between the Engineers as to whether it would not crack in the middle, or meet some other ill to which its kind is heir, but its construction was being slowly proceeded with in order to show that someone's opinion was right. In the opinion of many, to concentrate a great part of the garrison in such quarters, so near the front lines, was really laying a trap for ourselves. The ideal is adequate protection against the heaviest bombardment, in a position from which the men can emerge with no delay directly the bombardment lifts, but from this dug-out troops, with arms and other gear, would have taken a considerable time to man the trenches. They are rather difficult to keep clean, and the air becomes more or less foul.

While some of us were busy in building up our own defences and accommodation, others were equally busy in destroying Fritz's. No Man's Land was about 250 yards wide at the most in the Sector, and our Stokes Mortars could reach his front trench. Ammunition was extravagantly plentiful, and the Light Trench Mortar Batteries, as they are officially named, literally blew Fritz out, and his trench to pieces.

At first he retaliated feebly, but eventually accepted the position and withdrew to his support lines. And, indeed, no troops could be asked to face such terrific bombardment. Why, I cannot exactly say, but the Trench Mortars are the most demoralizing weapons: perhaps it is that the bombs are shot so high into the air that they descend almost vertically, and a parapet is no protection against them, or perhaps it is the horrid coughing noise they make on the way down, but there it is. Most men would rather be shot at by a long naval gun than a minenwerfer. Our brains became curiously at tuned to catch the "click" of the minenwerfer gun, and immediately the sound was heard, all necks would be craned to pick up the little black object turning over and over like a tumbler pigeon as it shot up in the sky. Small it seemed in its flight, but it was really a big shell. One dud that fell in this Sector was three feet long. Fortunately, for some reason the arc of fire of the gun was very limited, and the danger zone could be well marked and cleared of troops and dug-outs. In the Armentières trenches, however, the Huns on one occasion moved the gun up without any warning, and reached our support line, where Company Headquarters and the cookhouses were, and made a frightful mess of everything. And because their minenwerfer was by no means such a good weapon as the Stokes, which can be moved to any position with ease, and because bombs were thrown at him every day literally by the thousand, his front line soon became a mudheap, unoccupied save at one or two points.

"Trench feet," a condition approaching frost-bite, had to be fought very strenuously in the winter months. Twice a day the men took off their puttees and socks and boots and rubbed whale oil into their feet, and every day they were given dry socks. It was a familiar sight, the "sock men" trudging down the communication trenches with their sacks on their backs. The wet socks were washed and dried under Divisional arrangements and brought back to Battalion Headquarters every evening by the Transport. Winter clothing was good and rations plentiful. The latter in October, 1916, were fresh and preserved meat, bacon, potatoes, onions, tea, Sugar, condensed milk, jam, bread, biscuits, butter every other day, and cheese. Divisional dry canteens, which were miniature grocery stores, were numerous, and extra food could be bought. For the latter purpose the Battalion gave each Company a weekly subsidy out of the Regimental Funds, and the men themselves contributed, say, one franc every fortnightly pay-day. The Platoons appointed their own buyers, who scoured the country for vegetables, etc. Of the winter clothes, the most prized was the leather jerkin, a sleeveless jacket lined with cloth. The men used it all day, and reserved their dry greatcoats to sleep in. If it had had sleeves, its usefulness would have been still greater. Rain is the greatest evil in the trenches, for cold is not so hard to endure. Coke was issued on a fairly liberal scale, and with their braziers and the extra supplies of fuel they procured, from sources peculiarly their own, the inhabitants of each dug-out had their own fireside. At night there was the issue of rum, and later a hot cup of coffee for the men on watch. An

important man in the Company was the Gas Corporal, who was responsible that the men's gas masks were in perfect order. We were issued with the Small Box Respirator about this time, the last word in protection against gas ; each one was inspected every week, and on the Corporal's care depended their condition. He was also in charge of the Company salvage, the value of which ran into over a hundred pounds a month. Salvage consisted of any Government property that had been abandoned by troops in billets or trenches. The two moments of the Corporal's life were when we left and when we entered quarters. It was a matter of pride to leave nothing behind, but we were secretly pleased when we were bequeathed a quantity of rubbish by our predecessors.

Out of three tours of duty the Company did in the front trenches from the beginning of October until the following January---that is only twenty-four days altogether---two were at full moon and were, in consequence, less anxious. Any movement in No Man's Land could be easily detected in the bright light. Patrols could not be sent out when the moon was at its full, although the Listening Posts were manned. These Posts consisted of little posses, some short distance into No Man's Land, in which two or perhaps three men could lie and listen. The work in the middle of winter was sometimes more arduous than patrolling, as there was no means of keeping warm. In both patrolling and manning the Listening Posts, the hours had to be decreased very much in winter and the reliefs made more numerous.

Patrolling was rather unexciting in the Sector, until it became the fashion to explore the German front line and to prospect towards his supports, and the Company diary has no such entry as that for August 11th in the Armentières Sector: "Corporal Rogers took patrol of six other ranks from No. 9 Platoon out of Listening Post T 71 at 9.30 p.m., returning to same place at 1.45 a.m. Reported everything quiet except a German in his front trench playing 'The Wearin' of the Green,' on a piccolo."

No one was idle, for fatigue parties had to be found and the Company's "Working State" was constantly inspected by some malignant eye on Headquarters. Inspection is the life-blood of the Army. Someone of a rank above your own comes to see your men and your billets and your work and your belongings generally, and politely or not, as it pleases him, tells you what is the matter with them. To be told one's faults is always trying, and one of the social drawbacks of the Army is its constant occurrence.

With the wastage of non-commissioned officers, it became a serious matter to fill places of those promoted, killed, or evacuated from wounds or sickness. In war, as in peace, the N.C.O.'s are the backbone of the Army, and they must learn their work more thoroughly than anyone else. There were numerous Instructional Schools to which they were sent, but none of them dealt directly with their duties and responsibilities as N.C.O.'s, and Lieutenant-Colonel Hart, in instituting a Battalion School, did a very wise thing. He made the length of the course three weeks and trained six juniors from each Company. They lived together in a separate billet, under an officer and two Sergeant-Instructors. In four courses twenty-four N.C.O.'s were trained from each Company, that is six per Platoon, and the result was to raise the standard of the Battalion very considerably.

It will have been seen that the percentage of time spent in the front trenches was small, but even when in the Reserve Trenches and partly when in billets, the men had to march up to the Line every day for work. When not working they would be training or manning some of the subsidiary defences in the back area. At the same time, the changes were welcome and billets possessed attractions denied to the trenches: the Divisional cinema and concerts and the Estaminets, but, above all, football. Inter-Platoon matches were struggles indeed, but battles of giants were the games against the Taranaki Company of the 2nd Battalion, whom we beat 11-5, and against the Battalion Transport, whom we were leading 3-0, with one minute to go, when the ball burst. I was the referee in the last game, and wisely, I am convinced, made no effort to decide who had won.

Going back to the same billets, we had more interest in their improvement, and the Otagos and ourselves made them fairly comfortable. At the Commanding Officer's suggestion, tiers of bunks were constructed in the barns, which were cleaner and more healthy than sleeping on the ground. The occupier of the billet in which were Company Headquarters was a nice old Frenchwoman who sported three large plumes on Sunday. A brave sight she was, on her way to Mass in Sailly-sur-la-Lys. That village and Bac St. Maur, both with populations of two men and a dog, vied with each other for the honour of being our metropolis. The latter had a British Expeditionary Force Canteen, but the former possessed a butcher's shop where you could actually get a very good lunch or dinner.

While in Billets in December, the Battalion represented the Brigade at an inspection of the. Division by Sir Douglas Haig. The 2nd Brigade was the only one on parade with its four Battalions, as the 1st and 3rd Brigades were holding the line and the parade ground was perforce the Armentières-Estaires Road. He did not see us at our best, but it was our first official glimpse of the Commander-in-Chief, and everyone appreciated the honour he paid us.

And so time sauntered on, until we found ourselves on the 23rd December being relieved by our own 2nd Battalion and moving into billets in Sailly for sixteen days' training. The billets were poor, but they could be improved upon, and we were delighted to find we possessed a large hall where we could have our Company Christmas dinner, for which mighty preparations were on foot.

After Church Parade on Christmas Day, Generals Godley and Russell inspected the Company drawn up outside the Billet. General Godley spoke to the men, and they then inspected the cooks' arrangements for dinner. Cold turkey and ham, potatoes and cauliflower, plum pudding, apples, beer and wine appeared on the menu, and the Toast List was as follows:

The King	Major Weston.
The Company	Major Weston, responded to by Captain Narbey, Lieutenant McIsaac, Acting Sergeant-Major Lepper, and Sergeant Capper.
Absent Comrades	Captain Hawkins.
The N.C.O.'s	Lieutenant T. C. A. Hislop, responded to by Sergeants Pearce and Lawson.
Our wives and sweethearts	Lieutenant Baily, responded to by Lance-Corporal Joshua Jones.

The three months after the Somme were marked by a distinct improvement in the Interior Economy of the Division. Not that the Q. side in particular needed straightening up, but there was a feeling abroad---that came down maybe from the rarer atmosphere of General Headquarters, or Army Headquarters---that there must be no standing still, and consequently efforts were made to economize and to prevent waste in everything and to raise the standard of the men's "turn-out."

Battalion tailors and bootmakers were increased and more repairs done by them. The old idea, that the men should repair their own clothes proved untenable. In some Battalions the issue of clothes and boots was entrusted to the tailor and bootmaker, who, after all, were able to decide better than most subalterns or Company Commanders whether the men required new things and could superintend the fitting with more knowledge. By that means alone a great saying was effected. The Division had always been keen on salving, and generally seemed to be on top in the weekly list of rubbish collected in the Corps Area. The cooks were persuaded that dripping also had to be kept, for its weight was of golden value; bones and tea-leaves must have been considered beyond redemption, as their salvation seemed to be reserved for base camps.

The 1st January, 1917, marked a change that many of us regretted; to facilitate the keeping of records, the Canterbury and Otago Battalions left the First Brigade for the Second, the 2nd Battalions of the Auckland and Wellington Battalions taking their place. It had the advantage of including the two Battalions of each Regiment in the same Brigade, but the tradition of the two original Brigades was destroyed.

In December also, Brigadier General F. E. Johnston, C.B., was sent over to the New Zealand base camp at Sling to take charge of the training there, which needed reorganizing, and Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. J. Brown, D.S.O., New Zealand Staff Corps, was promoted temporary Brigadier-General and given the 1st Brigade. General Johnston had commanded the Brigade from its formation in 1914 and was much liked by all ranks. Although born in New Zealand, he was a Regular Soldier, and had seen service in India and Egypt with the

North Staffordshire Regiment. General Johnston had the faculty of taking a human interest in the officers and men of his Brigade, an interest that is generally repaid tenfold by its recipients. Certainly a smile and a pleasant word from the General made the day's work appreciably lighter. He returned to the Brigade in August, 1917, only to meet his death a few days later.

Chapter Nine
Table of Contents